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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, April, 1897.

THAN WHOM AND ITS CONGENERS.

THE older grammarians have usually regarded *than whom* as an anomaly, incapable of explanation, but justified by good usage. The only writer, so far as I know, bold enough to question its correctness, is Mr. Washington Moon, and he enjoys the unenviable distinction of fathering such a clause as, "Mr. Geo. Withers, than who no one has written more sensibly on this subject." Occasionally a timid appeal was made to the Latin ablative of comparison without *quam* (*minor Pompeio*), it being left to the reader to devise the ways and means by which the Latin succeeded in influencing the English construction.

Latterly, the expression has been considered as due to the analogy of *to whom*, *with whom*, *by whom*, etc., *than* being explained as a preposition. Jespersen, for example, considers it good English to follow *than* with the accusative of any personal pronoun. He defends such sentences as,*

"You are younger than me" (Fielding).

"He seems mightier than them" (Byron).

"She was neither better bred nor wiser than you or me" (Thackeray).

"This use of the acc. after *than*," says Jespersen, "of which Bishop Lowth, in his grammar (1762, p. 145), is already able to quote many examples from the writings of Swift, Lord Bolingbroke, Prior, etc., is now so universal as to be considered the normal construction; that is, to the general feeling *than* is a preposition as well as a conjunction."

I am inclined to think that Jespersen has greatly overestimated the prepositional tendency of *than*. The best modern writers,—De Quincey, Macaulay, Newman, Arnold, Lowell, Ruskin, Tennyson, for example,—do not employ such sentences as those cited. If Jespersen is right, then "You love her more than me," and the countless similar sentences become at once hopelessly tangled.

However, while he seems to me to overstate

* For other examples, see Jespersen, *Progress in Lang.*, p. 199; Storm, *Englische Philologie*, p. 712; Mätzner, *Englische Grammatik*, ii, p. 12; and Baskervill and Sewell, *English Grammar*, p. 280.

the tendency, no one can question that it is to the influence of prepositions that we must trace the origin of *than* and the acc. in the sentences cited. Whether good English or not, these sentences testify to a prepositional drift in *than* and furnish interesting material to the student of historical English grammar.

But why (1) should *than* with pronouns show any special disposition to assume the function of a preposition? And why (2) has this disposition triumphed in the case of *than whom*?

(1) Comparison in Latin was expressed either by *quam* or by the ablative. Both constructions possessed sufficient vitality to perpetuate themselves (but with altered boundary lines) in the Romance tongues; but in the change from a synthetic to an analytic language, the ablative is, of course, replaced by a preposition and an oblique case. In French the preposition used is *de*; in Italian *di*, in Spanish *de*, etc.: *Il a plus de six ans*; *Tu sei più grande di me*; *Es mas rico de lo que V cree*, etc.

Now the Old English, like the Latin, had two methods of comparison, by *ðonne* or by the dative alone. The first has come down to us unchanged. What has become of the second? Is not the prepositional drift of *than* before pronouns the analogue of the Old English dative without *ðonne*? In other words, *than* would seem to have fallen heir in popular usage to an inheritance to which it has at least some show of historical claim.

Moreover, the prepositional use of *than* before the personal pronouns has not been traced to a period preceding the Queen Anne Age. Why did it attain its chief florescence then? It seems to me that the influence of the French idioms, *que moi*, *que toi*, *que lui*, etc., must be conceded. It was a period in England of strong French influence. If *it is me* was influenced by *c'est moi*, why may we not still more confidently claim for *than me* the influence of *que moi*, seeing that Old English had already prepared the way for a construction of this nature? Notice, too, that in French, *que* is used as a pure conjunction (*il est plus âgé que je ne croyais*) and as a pure preposition (*il est meilleur que moi*). Is not the double function, then, of *than* to be attributed most rea-

sonably to the influence of the French *que*? When Prior writes (see Storm, *Eng. Phil.*, p. 713)

"Thou art a girl, as much brighter than *her*,
As he is a poet sublimer than *me*,"

it is impossible not to feel that he is strongly under the influence of French models.

But why did not the Old English dative of comparison develop into prepositional *than* without the aid of the French idiom, and why is not prepositional *than* as fully established to-day as conjunctive *than*, or as French prepositional *que*? This is a difficult question, but the answer seems to me to lie in the wide employment, during all periods of English, of *do* as a substitute for the verb of the preceding clause. In such a sentence as *He talks better than I*, if anything be understood after *I*, it is *do*, not *talk*. Indeed, all forms of *do* as thus used, have become so common that *than* has to fight its way with great difficulty to a purely prepositional import. When a Frenchman says *Il parle mieux que moi*, there is, of course, no mentally supplied predicate following *moi*. Such a predicate has long dropped out of consciousness, the French having no colorless word like *do* to keep alive the conjunctive force of *que*. But with us, the case is different: in Old English, Middle English, and Modern English, *do* has been our *pro-verb*. With the sole exception of the verb *to be*, there is not a verb in our language that *do* cannot represent, provided its antecedent does not precede it too far.

I repeat, therefore, that the introduction, or at least the florescence, in the Queen Anne Age of prepositional *than* before the personal pronouns, is due to French influence; and that the forces now operative in English do not seem to warrant an indiscriminate use of *than* as a preposition before the personal pronouns.

(2) But the case is different with *than whom*. We cannot mentally supply a predicate in this construction. The genius of the language is "dead" against it. What is Mr. Moon's understood predicate in his *than who* construction? An oblique case is forced upon us. The nominative is impossible. Precisely the same impossibility is evidenced in Latin. Cicero's comparison, *Polybium sequamur, quo nemo fuit diligentior*, could not be otherwise ex-

pressed. *Quam qui* might delight Mr. Moon, but no Roman. The palmary example of *than whom* is Milton's

"Beelzebub, than whom none higher sat."

But Shakespeare has one employment of the same construction (L. L. L. iii, 1, 180),

"A domineering pedant o'er the bay;
Than whom no mortal so magnificent!"

The *than whom* construction seems, therefore, to have originated in the Italian period of our language, at least a hundred years before the recorded appearance of *than me*, *than him*, etc. The most reasonable inference is that there has been Italian influence; for, in Italian, *than* with any pronoun is represented by the preposition *di*, provided, of course, no predicate follow; and with *than* and the relative pronoun, a sequent predicate is impossible.

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THE "CRÓNICA DE LOS RIMOS ANTIGUOS."

IN the year 1863, the well-known Spanish scholar, Amador de los Rios, made a contribution to Spanish literature by publishing portions of a hitherto unknown poem on Count Fernan Gonzalez, a favorite national hero of the Middle Ages. In his *Historia Crítica de la Literatura Española*,¹ he tells us all that is known of this poem and cites from it, in all, some two hundred verses. The poem is preserved in fragments interspersed in a prose chronicle of Fernan Gonzalez. The prose chronicle is written by Fray Gonzalo de Arredondo, Abbot of San Pedro de Arlanza, and Royal Chronicler to Ferdinand and Isabella. Arredondo dedicates his work to the Emperor Charles V, which fact leads Rios to put the date of the prose chronicle, or at least the dedication, after the year 1520.

The following is a brief summary of Rios' conclusions in regard to the poetic fragments. The poem is virtually a reproduction of the celebrated old thirteenth century *Poema de Fernan Gonzalez*, but it differs from this work in the form of versification, as well as in the manner of describing events; and furthermore, it contains various events not found in

¹ Vol. iv, pp. 443-459.